



**SACRAMENTO RIVER CONSERVATION AREA
ANNUAL REPORT
2000-2001**

The Sacramento River Conservation Area Board Members

Chair: Ben Carter, Landowner*

Vice Chair: Jane Dolan, Butte County*

Secretary/Treasurer: Don Anderson, Landowner*

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Bill Borrer, Tehama County
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Doug White, Colusa County
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Mark Charlton, Corps of Engineers
Diana Jacobs, Department of Fish and Game*
Pete Rabbon, The Reclamation Board
Dan Castleberry, Fish and Wildlife
Dwight Russell, Department of Water Resources

* Executive Committee

Manager, Burt Bundy
Assistant, Pat Brown

Background

In 1998, the Department of Water Resources, in cooperation with the Advisory Council, received a CALFED grant to hire a Sacramento River Conservation Area Coordinator to complete a Memorandum of Agreement between Counties and State and Federal agencies to organize and establish a management entity to help accomplish the goal of the program; to preserve remaining habitat and reestablish a continuous riparian ecosystem along the river from Keswick to Verona. Through those efforts, eighteen agencies, including the seven counties within the Conservation Area, signed the MOA, and organization of the non-profit was begun. The Chico State University Research Foundation administrated the grant and the Department of Water Resources has provided office space and technical support.

The MOA signatories are as follows: The Resources Agency, California Department of Fish and Game, California State Parks and Recreation, California Wildlife Conservation Board, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, California State Lands Commission, U. S. Bureau of Land Management, Glenn County, Butte County, Shasta County, Colusa County, Tehama County, Sutter County, Yolo County, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U. S. Bureau of Reclamation, The State Reclamation Board, California Department of Water Resources.

In the MOA the signatories agreed to:

- 1) Adopt the Sacramento River Conservation Area Handbook and accompanying GIS.
- 2) Support the formation of a public, nonprofit organization to coordinate river activities within a 230,000 acre Conservation Area on the Sacramento River.
- 3) Assist and coordinate sub-reach and site-specific planning activities within the Conservation Area.

All seven counties along 222 miles of the Sacramento River named in the original legislation (SB1086) have signed the MOA with many state and federal agencies to coordinate activities within a 230,000 acre Conservation Area.

The Sacramento River Conservation Area Nonprofit Organization, (NPO), held its first Board of Directors meeting in Willows on Wednesday, May 31, 2000. The Board of Directors is made up of public interest and landowner appointees of each of the seven counties and agency representatives dedicated to coordinating various activities along the River. The new Board adopted and authorized the filing of the By-laws and Articles of Incorporation, and elected officers of the new public, nonprofit corporation. Glenn County Supervisor Denny Bungarz was elected Chairman, Colusa landowner Ben Carter, Vice Chairman, and Butte County Supervisor Jane Dolan, Secretary/Treasurer of

the NPO. The Department of Fish and Game, the Department of Water Resources and the State Reclamation Board, along with an appointee of the State Resources Agency represent the State of California on the Board. The Army Corps of Engineers, Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Reclamation provide Federal representation.

The requirements of the CALFED grant were met or exceeded in all areas:

- Eighteen signatories have agreed to the provisions of the MOA, and it is anticipated that other agencies will be added.
- The Nonprofit Organization, Sacramento River Conservation Area, has been created as a California Corporation, filed its papers with the Internal Revenue Service as a 501c-3 not-for-profit entity, and is meeting monthly.
- Coordination of sub-reach and site-specific planning efforts are continuing at Hamilton City, Woodson Bridge and Bloody Island, as are various other projects, and the Department of Water Resources GIS is providing information for many related efforts.
- Public education and outreach efforts with various groups are ongoing and our website, www.sacramentoriver.ca.gov provides SRCA information to a large audience. The Newsletter is mailed to about 650 interested individuals.

Current Grant Status

Since October, 2000, a CVPIA/AFRP grant has provided funding to provide initial staffing for the newly created nonprofit management entity, which will implement the MOA, coordinate management activities, continue working with local government and landowners to resolve outstanding issues, and facilitate natural process and meander zone restoration, which are all key SB1086 objectives. Again, Department of Water Resources and Chico State University Research Foundation have provided administrative and technical support.

Ongoing planning activities are a continuing effort of this program. Brief reviews of the status of the assigned tasks are as follows:

- Task 1) Establish organizational structure and office to support the SRCA activities. Review program responsibilities and develop a "Program of Work".

The Manager and Assistant are in place and the office has been set up. The Department of Water Resources has provided space and some services at the Northern District offices in Red Bluff. Board and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meetings are being held on a regular basis. The SRCA Staff coordinates 24 other meetings each month which require developing agenda, establishing meeting locations, and

sending out up to 1800 announcements. A prioritized “issues to be resolved” list has been developed that serves as a work program.

- **Task 2)** Assist in development of sub-reach planning. Set up and coordinate with Technical Review Committee and establish a review process.

The TAC has met with good attendance and active participation. Coordination with TNC sub-reach level planning at Hamilton City and Beehive Bend and with BLM in the Bend Area continues. Sub-reach planning for the area above Colusa is being discussed. Site-specific planning efforts at several locations, including the M&T/Llano Seco pumps, Woodson Bridge, and Bloody Island, are ongoing.

- **Task 3)** Public education and outreach.

The Outreach Committee is developing informational materials for a brochure. A Frequently Asked Question section has been included in the newsletter that is mailed to about 650 each month. Several local area workshops and meetings have been held, as well as presentations at several conferences and forums. A website, www.sacramentoriver.ca.gov, is maintained through Department of Water Resources and updated regularly by the SRCA staff.

- **Task 4)** Development of a permit streamlining process.

A Board Committee to develop information about such programs as, “Safe Harbor”, Habitat Conservation Plans, “Incidental Take”, and a Good Neighbor Policy has been formed. Discussion at the Board level by agency members about permit requirements, and methods of addressing them, are ongoing. A review of the permit process for work at M & T/Llano Seco Pumps and Woodson Bridge has been suggested.

- **Task 5)** Project administration.

Chico State University has set up an administrative protocol to manage grants under their preview. All hiring, payroll, and benefits programs, plus budgeting, are done through CSU. Administration of projects in conjunction with, or under contract with, other organizations will be administered through those specific agreements.

Current Activities

Landowner Assurances Committee---In July, the Board established a Landowners Assurances Committee to determine a method of reducing the impacts of restoration efforts to adjoining landowners, local government, and service entities. Several current processes for protection were discussed including HCPs, Mitigation Banking, Safe Harbor, and local land use planning. The group identified a “Good Neighbor Policy” as the process that protects the landowner from “outside” activities. The concept of a contingency fund, or “Landowners Assurances Fund” was also discussed, and both of

these concepts were determined to be the best possible mechanisms to prevent or alleviate impacts. Members of the Committee are in the process of establishing a draft policy for the Board to consider.

Economic Studies--Over the past three years, the SRCA has tried to address questions about the economic impact of conversion of agricultural land to habitat. The first study was contracted in 1999 with the California State University, Department of Economics, to determine "The Impact on Glenn County Property Tax Revenues of Public Land Acquisitions in the Sacramento River Conservation Area". The second, "The Economic Impact on Glenn County of Public Land Acquisition and Habitat Restoration Activities in the Sacramento River Conservation Area", also by the CSU Economics Department, was completed in June of 2001. Both of these studies focused on Glenn County because of the relative size and scope of the effort compared to funding availability, the general similarity with other counties in the SRCA, and the availability of data from the Glenn County Assessor's and Tax Collector's offices.

The first study concluded that there were no significant impacts to tax revenues to Glenn County. Based on the assumptions of the second study, indications are that in 2015, the annual impact (costs minus benefits) to the economy of Glenn County would peak at about \$5,000,000. However, over the long run, if there was adequate investment in developing recreational facilities for the public, benefits could exceed costs. While the impact to the County's economy is significant, it was much less than many anticipated. This information is helpful in determining long-term trends and in planning for ways to reduce the difference between costs and benefits. Conservation easements that allow continued farming operations and the development of policies or the construction of facilities to encourage recreational activities can alter those figures.

The SRCA will continue to support ways to limit or reduce impacts to the local economy and entities from the conversion of agricultural lands. The Handbook clearly states that local entities should not lose revenue from the increase of public lands. One assurance that has been proposed for a Handbook amendment is the definition of the area between the Inner River Zone and the outer boundary of the Conservation Area as an "Agricultural Conservation Area". This definition would recognize the economic, as well as the environmental, benefit of keeping this land in agriculture.

In August, a newly formed Economic/PILT Impact Board Committee met and established objectives toward full PILT and Refuge Revenue sharing; research and review appropriate strategies to pursue; identify baseline and other information for long term analysis, and; determine methods to reduce economic losses from activities within the SRCA. The Committee agreed to study proposed projects and to keep the Board informed of possible economic impacts to all stakeholders.

Geographical Information System--The Department of Water Resources has developed a detailed Geographical Information System (GIS) that has provided scientific information in facilitating planning efforts. A contract is in place between Department of Water Resources and Chico State Geographical Information Center (GIC) to develop a public access website which should be up and running by June 2002. A cooperative agreement between the Department of Water Resources, the U.S.

Geological Survey, and the Farm Service Agency has jointly funded the creation of DOQQ'S to cover the entire Valley floor. In an effort to develop an up-to-date baseline of all the riparian vegetation in the valley, the Wildlife Conservation Board, The Nature Conservancy, and Department of Water Resources have partnered and funded the Geographical Information Center to update riparian coverage, this is in process and should be completed this fiscal year. The Department of Water Resources is also working with CALFED to establish a Sacramento River Science Program.

Handbook Amendments--The Advisory Council recognized the need to amend the Handbook periodically, and included a process for that to occur. The Board, through the TAC, has been working on specific changes to the Handbook. Two of these were listed in the January 2000 edition as amendments to be resolved later. The first, regarding the definition of "Hard points" along the River has been tentatively accepted by the Board and will move toward adoption this fall. The second, wording relative to the relationship of bank stabilization to habitat, has been combined with the new language for "Hard points", and will also be moved toward adoption. The definition of Inner River Zone guidelines for Reaches 1, 3, & 4 and a change in the Glossary definition of the SRCA have been discussed and new language has been crafted and agreed upon by the TAC and the Board. While these later changes were not anticipated, the discussion and workshops relative to these issues have been generally well attended and provided a forum for public information about the SRCA.

Outreach efforts---An Outreach Committee of the Board has been formed and suggested improvements to the Newsletter are being instituted. Several presentations on the SRCA have been made to various groups including a sportsman group, service clubs, County Fish and Game Commissions, county Farm Bureaus, Boards of Supervisors, and local Resource Conservation Districts. Reclamation and Water Districts, along with various City Councils also need to be approached. The Committee is in the process of developing a proposal for public relations activities.

Planning Activities

Hamilton City---The effort at Hamilton City started with local requests to solve ongoing flood control problems that threatened the town and adjacent farmland. Local residents and Glenn County have been working for years with the Corps of Engineers and The State Reclamation Board to repair or replace a private, inadequate levee that provides protection to the area. Through discussions with local residents, conservation groups, and Glenn County representatives, consideration of riparian habitat restoration as part of the project, has evolved. With the direction for both flood damage reduction and ecosystem restoration as part of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers Basin Comprehensive Study, a plan that can accomplish both goals is being developed. Sub-reach planning of the Hamilton City area through efforts of The Nature Conservancy and the Sacramento River Conservation Area has added to the information available,

and when tied to the GIS and modeling done by Department of Water Resources and the Comprehensive Study, new dimensions of river management can be achieved. Innovative funding for acquisition restoration lands and construction of flood control facilities has been committed, and authorization to move forward is being sought.

The Sacramento River Conservation Area has helped bring a broad coalition of interests to the process, and is facilitating planning and informational meetings with the Community Services District.

Discussion of issues such as: the possible relocation of the town's sewer system; flood related impacts on the Butte County side of the River; additional restoration opportunities within the sub-reach; and, improvement of Hwy 32 dependability during flood periods, will be facilitated through the SRCA. As the sub-reach planning efforts produce information and the Hamilton City project moves forward, the SRCA will continue to coordinate the planning process with all interested parties.

Woodson Bridge---The Sacramento River Conservation Area has coordinated public scoping meetings with the Tehama County Flood Control and Water Conservation District and the Department of Water Resources to outline a proposal to modify an existing Corps of Engineers project by removing rock revetment to promote ecosystem restoration through natural ecological processes. As the river is allowed to move back into Kopta Slough, a historic location for the Sacramento River, shaded riverine aquatic and bank swallow nesting habitat would be encouraged and the natural processes would promote riparian forest succession to a substantial area of publicly owned land. That relocation would also reduce the erosion on State and County parks that contain significant remnants of Valley Oak Woodland. The removed rock revetment would be re-used at the South Avenue crossing of the Sacramento River where continual erosion threatens the Woodson Bridge abutment and essential community access.

This project has developed through a consensus building process resulting in the support of local landowners, conservation groups, city and county entities, and state and federal agencies. It provides environmental restoration to an existing Corps of Engineer's project, is within the Sacramento River Conservation Area, Reach #2 Inner River Zone, and is consistent with CALFED Stage 1 Action to protect, enhance, and restore the natural river meander belt. It also will compliment and enhance the adjacent Nature Conservancy restoration efforts. The SRCA will continue its efforts to help plan and coordinate this project.

Bloody Island---The SRCA instituted and coordinated a conservation easement, fee title acquisition, and restoration effort with the landowner, the Bureau of Land Management and the Trust for Public Lands that provides protection for several miles of Sacramento River and Battle Creek frontage, as well as prime agricultural land in Shasta and Tehama Counties. Funding was provided through the Packard Foundation, a CALFED grant and BLM exchange properties. Discussions with other landowners are continuing. BLM is working to set in place protections of both habitat and agriculture along the River in the Bend Management Area. The Department of Water Resources is conducting a fluvial geomorphologic study of riparian areas along the river to

determine locations for possible restoration. Other interested groups are beginning to advocate a Bend National Conservation Area designation by Congress.

The SRCA will facilitate public involvement for the discussion of planning activities in this area and will continue to bring all interested parties together. A sub-reach planning effort may be appropriate for this area.

Beehive Bend---The Nature Conservancy has begun a sub-reach planning study in the Beehive Bend reach of the River and has involved the SRCA in that process. One of the key components to this effort has been an analysis of the economic impacts of agricultural land conversion to habitat within a 4 county area. Hydrologic and hydraulic modeling is also part of the investigations that are part of this planning process. As this information becomes available, the SRCA will start facilitating local involvement with the planning process. Several acquisitions have occurred or are proposed within the Inner River Zone in this area, and habitat restoration activities must use the information provided through the Sub-reach plan and be coordinated through the SRCA.

M & T/Llano Seco Ranch pumps and Chico sewer outfall---A gravel bar is migrating downstream from the mouth of Big Chico Creek that is threatening the operation of both the pumps for M & T and Llano Seco Ranches and the sewer outfall for Chico. The pumped water from this recently constructed facility is also used for state and federal refuges on the Llano Seco and to replace water rights in Butte Creek. The SRCA has been working with all affected parties to determine both short and long term solutions. CALFED has provided funding for scientific investigations to facilitate continued operations until a more permanent "fix" is devised.

Various Restoration Projects---Several restoration projects on State or Federal properties along the river have occurred with input and discussion through the SRCA. Updates of activities along the River are scheduled at the monthly TAC and SRCA Board meetings. The Nature Conservancy and the Sacramento River Partners have contracted with various agencies to plan and implement restoration projects on public land within the Sacramento River Conservation Area. Input provided through the SRCA has helped address issues such as: Affects of plantings and contouring on flood flows and capacities; impact of wildlife to the production of adjacent cropland; threat of Endangered Species moving to farmland; the need for cooperation between adjacent landowners/managers, and biologic priorities and criteria for natural river processes. These efforts are the first steps of Site-Specific planning as discussed in the SRCA Handbook.

Future Activities

Colusa Sub-Reach---A Sub-reach planning activity for the area above the City of Colusa is proposed as a joint venture with The Nature Conservancy. Several restoration and flood control maintenance activities are occurring in this area, and a

more comprehensive planning process is needed for this area. The SRCA would coordinate this process and ensure public involvement.

Public Use/Recreation Strategy---Public use along the Sacramento River is increasing and this use was somewhat unanticipated during the development of the Handbook. It is evident that the needs of not only the private property owners, but also those of the public property users, must be addressed. The Wildlife Conservation Board has requested the reallocation of some unused funds from CALFED to develop a strategy to improve and facilitate recreational use along the River. The SRCA will coordinate the development of this strategy by providing public workshops and including all public land management entities within the Conservation Area. After a strategy is developed, the SRCA may be the entity that would facilitate funding sources for further recommended actions. The need for mapping of access areas as well as private property is evident. With the available Department of Water Resources GIS base, an up-to-date website for prospective users is a natural for the SRCA. Maintenance monies could be increased and redundant permit processes reduced for boating access points within all the counties involved. The increase of local revenue from expanded public use could help offset the loss of agricultural production within the Inner River Zone.

Additional Sub-Reach planning---There are other areas on the river that could benefit by the intensive planning process that sub-reach plans provide. Those areas will evolve as needs increase. The SRCA will play a significant role in the process of determining the location, timing and issues addressed for these planning efforts.

Site-specific planning---As lands within the Inner River Zone are voluntarily considered for restoration or other uses, site-specific planning and consideration of developed sub-reach plans will provide assurances that the proposed activities will not impose added costs to adjoining neighbors.

Manager's Comments

The signing of the MOA signified the "official" beginning of the Nonprofit Organization. With the first meeting of the group, election of officers, and the adoption of by-laws in May, 2000, the pace of the corporation has been busy and, to say the least, interesting. Some local individuals and groups have resisted the organization. Others have seen the benefit of a process that includes all the stakeholders in guiding and planning activities that affect the river. The result has been both educational and a re-examination of the process of planning and change.

Support and acknowledgement of the process of local involvement in river management activities by CALFED, the CVPIA/AFRP, and the COE/Reclamation Board San Joaquin/Sacramento River Basins Comprehensive Study has been beneficial in

developing dialogue and understanding between agencies and individuals. Much of the coordination of activities occurs with local entities or individuals trying to work through the complicated processes of agency regulation and requirements. By being part of the local discussions, both parties gain insight into the process, and issues resolved.

Coordination of public awareness of restoration activities is a valuable, but not yet entirely fulfilled, product of the program. Both sub-reach and site-specific planning provides the exchange of thoughts and ideas to address the issues related to the restoration of lands along the river. Sub-reach planning provides a broader perspective and allows for more generalized information and solutions to be developed, while site-specific planning requires that information and those hypotheses be applied in working situations. Finding the flexibility in law, and in human nature, to provide the assurances needed to give all parties a comfort level with the changes needed to fulfill restoration goals will require a tremendous investment in time and understanding. With that having been said, the SRCA has made progress with both landowners and land management agencies in working together to provide those assurances. Through SRCA Board dialogue, TAC discussions, and informational efforts undertaken by agencies and local entities, concerns are being discussed and if not addressed, identified, and included into Board Committees formed to initiate policy and formulate possible solutions.

As the Sacramento River Conservation Area moves into its second full year, Sub-Reach and Site-Specific planning activities will increase. Policy issues centering on "Economic Impacts", a "Good Neighbor Policy", and "Assurances Funds" will key important Board discussions. A Public Use and Recreation strategy should be addressed, and mapping, as well as recreational services, improved. The forum for discussion of river related issues by all interested parties is probably one of the most important products of the SB1086 Program.